Project Name: Sierra Nevada Adaptive Management Project

2. Project Summary

A century of fire suppression and a rapidly changing climate have placed the Sierra Nevada's forests and residents under the threat of catastrophic wildfire. Consequently, the record of decision regarding the US Forest Service's Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA 2004) adopts "an integrated vegetation management strategy with the primary objective of protecting communities and modifying landscape-scale fire behavior to reduce the size and severity of wildfires." The goal of this proposal is to support an innovative three-party adaptive management approach that creates a collaboration of scientists, managers, and stakeholders to implement this strategy. The outcome sought is improved information about how to manage Sierran ecosystems in ways that improve forest health, protect water and wildlife resources, reduce fire hazard, and maximize opportunity to build support among stakeholders rather than generate controversy. We seek support for enhancement of efforts to integrate the public—often referred to here as stakeholders—into the project. This includes outreach through meetings and workshops, field participation in science, and a unique, cutting edge interactive website with a spatial/geographical interface.

One innovative aspect of the integrated vegetation management plan is an explicit landscape planning approach epitomized by an emphasis on fireshed assessments. Fireshed assessment is an interdisciplinary process to change fuels and vegetation at the landscape scale (Bahro and Barber 2004). It includes the strategic placement of treatment areas across the landscape (SPLAT, Strategically Placed Landscape Area Treatments) to limit wildland fire spread (Finney 2001). Despite the sound conceptual underpinning of strategic fuel treatments, there is uncertainty regarding their efficacy in modifying fire behavior and concern about potential impacts on wildlife and water resources. Moreover, given the history of debate over land and resource management in the Sierra Nevada, a lasting solution must engage stakeholders and promote active public participation in all phases of the process. To address these uncertainties, a partnership of federal and state agencies requested the help of the University of California (UC). This resulted in a proposal for the Sierra Nevada Adaptive Management Project (SNAMP), with the goal of developing an unprecedented three party model for public forest management. UC researchers are committed to acting as an independent third party with expertise in ecosystem science and participatory processes. After more than 2 years of a planning process that integrated public participation and input, SNAMP was launched on May 1, 2007. We have selected two study sites where the US Forest Service is implementing fireshed management: the northern site is on the Tahoe National Forest (SNC Central Region) and the southern site is on the Sierra National Forest (SNC Southern Region) (Figs 1 and 2).

The UC science team's third party role is a unique experiment in US public land management. The UC science team is striving to provide independent, high quality scientific information about Forest Service management outcomes that will contribute to the resource management knowledge base. Yet perhaps even more importantly, given that public controversy about public land management is one of the main constraints and costs of management, the science team, by inviting public/stakeholder participation in the scientific process, and offering public accountability, seeks to build understanding and trust among the US Forest Service, UC, and the

public. The effectiveness of this extraordinary, three party (Forest Service, UC, and public/stakeholder) configuration of the adaptive management process will be evaluated as part of the project. It is our belief that the participation of a third party "monitor," like UC, facilitates public trust. Yet our capacity to engage the public and to study the adaptive management process is constrained by both the availability of funding and federal restrictions on research interviews. Support from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy would alleviate these constraints. We are convinced that an adaptive management process with third party participation – one that includes thoughtful experimentation and meaningful discussions among scientists, managers, and the public – is the best way to address more than two decades of uncertainty and controversy surrounding the management of federal forests. Through this process of dynamic collaboration, our hope is to make a lasting contribution to the environmental and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada.

Total costs for the Sierra Nevada Adaptive Management Project during the first two years of this seven year project is $2,6000,000. Total grant request from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy is $383,835 ($250,873 of direct support).